


Whatever
It Takes



Richard DuFour
Rebecca DuFour
Robert Eaker
Gayle Karhanek

Richard DuFour
Rebecca DuFour
Robert Eaker
Gayle Karhanek

Constraints on schedule -

"All Kids Will Learn—Or Else!"

to establish that impact on student achievement, Michael Rutter, researchers who produced results from similar practices of their students over a 35-year period not only that student achievement, we produce results of student back-

the long-standing genetic lottery were compelling evidence was: first, "all students actors necessary to learn" (Lezotte, 2004). "became the rallying cry in America. Since the mission" as one of all districts throughout the country and word-although created in the 1960s across the country much alike because all children can learn. Yet, we ourselves on their own to help all students learn with traditional

policies, programs, and procedures that virtually guaranteed all students would not learn. The longstanding belief that high levels of learning were reserved for the few and the structures that had been put in place to support that belief were not to be overcome by simply drafting a new mission statement.

Start

Three Critical Questions

In our earlier books, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Student Achievement* (1998) and *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (2002), we argue that when schools truly begin to align their practices with a commitment to learning for all, the educators within them begin to function as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Working together collaboratively, the people in a PLC begin to focus on the three critical questions: Exactly what is it we want all students to learn? How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills? What happens in our school when a student does not learn?

Exactly What Is It We Want All Students to Learn?

Ask almost any teacher in North America if he or she believes all kids can learn, and it is almost guaranteed the teacher will answer in the affirmative. But ask that teacher if he or she believes all students can master calculus by the end of their freshman year of high school, and the answer will be an emphatic "no." Saying we believe all kids can learn is a pleasant affirmation, but it is only when teachers can articulate exactly what each student is expected to know and be able to do that the "learning for all" mission becomes possible.



WHATEVER IT TAKES

Researchers found that in effective schools "each of the teachers in the school has a clear understanding of what the essential learner objectives are, grade by grade and course by course" (Lezotte, 2004). Marzano (2003) referred to this clarity of focus as a "guaranteed and viable curriculum." Doug Reeves (2004) describes the concept as "power standards." Regardless of the terminology, the premise of learning for all demands that each teacher knows exactly what every student is to accomplish as a result of each unit of instruction.

Unfortunately, many school districts that wrote new mission statements failed to initiate procedures to engage teachers in the clarification of the core curriculum. Some districts simply allowed each teacher to continue to determine what was significant and important for students to learn, resulting in wildly varying content and outcomes for students in the same grade level or course within a school. In other districts the central office staff developed voluminous curriculum guides and presented them to schools with the mistaken belief that teachers who had no involvement in the process would dutifully teach what they were told to teach. Some districts adopted textbook series and mandated that teachers not stray from them, and still others simply waited for the state or provincial governments to clarify the core curriculum. Despite the newly professed commitment to help all kids learn, districts typically failed to take adequate steps to ensure that every teacher was aware of and committed to the essential knowledge and skills students were to master.

In this statement
as true now as it
was in 1987 - 1988



Constraints on schedule -

"All Kids Will Learn—Or Else!"

How Will We Know When Each Student Has Acquired the Essential Knowledge and Skills?

If a school was truly committed to ensuring that every student mastered the intended outcomes of the core curriculum, it would be vigilant in its effort to assess each student's learning on a timely, ongoing basis. Unfortunately, once again, districts that adopted mission statements that promised "learning for all" typically failed to develop the procedures to answer the question, "Is each student learning?" Again, in some districts the nature and frequency of assessment was left to the discretion of individual teachers. More typically, districts used nationally normed assessments and focused on average scores in monitoring student achievement. This strategy is flawed in at least two ways. First, nationally normed tests are specifically designed to distribute students along a continuum of scores. The objective of these tests is not to assess an individual student's mastery of essential learning, but rather to differentiate between students with higher and lower scores. Second, average scores can hide the fact that some students are failing to achieve the intended outcomes. If a district contends that its mission is to help students learn "on average," focusing on nationally normed test results would be appropriate, but such assessments are incongruent with the mission of helping *each* student learn.

When states and provinces began to develop required exams for all of the students in their regions, the new exams typically did shift the focus from averages to individual student mastery. These mandated tests tended to be criterion-referenced assessments that asked if students had been able to achieve the designated standard of proficiency. While they represented an improvement over nationally normed tests, they

failed to provide the timely feedback essential to learning. The information gleaned from state and provincial exams typically came too late in the year to be used to help students, most of whom had moved to the next grade.

Assessments must be for learning

Schools that operate as Professional Learning Communities use formative assessments on a frequent basis to ask, "Are the students learning and what steps must we take to address the needs of those who have not learned?" State and provincial assessments, on the other hand, typically represent *summative* assessments that ask, "Did the students learn what they were supposed to have learned by the designated deadline?" Rick Stiggins differentiates between formative and summative assessment by clarifying that the former is "assessment *for* learning" while the latter is "assessment *of* learning" (2002). One is used on an ongoing basis to monitor individual student learning and to impact instructional practice so that all students master intended outcomes. The other is used to assign a designation and, quite often, punitive consequences for students who fail to meet the standard. The difference between a formative and summative assessment has also been described as the difference between a physical examination and an autopsy. The intent of one is to diagnose and prescribe the appropriate intervention; the intent of the other is to explain why the patient (or student) failed to make it. PLCs prefer physicals to autopsies.

What Happens in our School When a Student Does Not Learn?

Marzano (2003) has described three different levels of curriculum. The first is the intended curriculum—what we intend for each student to learn. The second is the implemented curriculum—what is actually taught. The third is the attained curriculum—what students actually learn. A school that is truly



Constrains
on file

Crusell
Electrics
Lansing, Mich.
Jan

A
 A
 W



WHATEVER IT TAKES

rationale behind this approach suggests that educators have always known how to help all kids learn but have been too disinterested in the welfare of their students or too lazy to put forth the necessary effort. Fear is needed to provide the necessary motivation—either perform or risk closing your school and/or losing your job.

We believe this premise is fundamentally flawed. First, we believe that teachers, in general, have the best interests of their students at heart and are willing to work very, very hard in the effort to help all students be successful. In fact, we contend that there are few, if any, occupations in which people work harder than teachers. Second, the idea that people can be threatened or coerced into higher performance runs contrary to what is universally recognized as best practice for leading organizations. Fear may produce some short-term efforts, but it is ineffective at generating the sustained motivation necessary to transform a school into a PLC. The NCLB threat to continue the beatings until morale improves seems far more likely to drive educators out of the profession and potential educators into other more satisfying fields than to create the energy and enthusiasm for the difficult work at hand.

Thus, we are not apologists for NCLB, and in fact, we are deeply disturbed by many of the specific provisions of the act. We do, however, acknowledge the need for schools to move beyond pious mission statements pledging learning for all and to begin the systematic effort to create procedures, policies, and programs that are aligned with that purpose.

Our objective in writing this book is *not* to help schools raise test scores and avoid sanctions. Our purpose is twofold. First, we hope to persuade educators that we should take our

mission
levels of
legislative
and ethical
our efforts
Second,
levels that
assumption
from each
different
scores
ensuring
in every
toward
tactics that

In s
upon the
to offer
the data
students l



In this statement
as true now as of
1993 - 1997

Consider
our files
11/1/91

"All Kids Will Learn—Or Else!"

mission statements literally. We should indeed promote high levels of learning for every child entrusted to us, not because of legislation or fear of sanctions, but because we have a moral and ethical imperative to do so. We can no longer claim that our efforts have no impact on the learning of our students. Second, it is possible to help more students succeed at higher levels than ever before *if* we are willing to change many of our assumptions and practices, most of which draw their origins from earlier times when education was intended to serve a far different purpose. This book rests upon the conviction that test scores will take care of themselves if educators commit to ensuring that each student masters essential skills and concepts in every unit of instruction, align their practices and resources toward that purpose, and discontinue many traditional practices that do not serve that purpose.

In short, we hope both to challenge educators to reflect upon the current practices in their schools and classrooms and to offer specific suggestions as to how they might better meet the daunting but vitally important challenge of helping all students learn at high levels.

Chapter 3

A High School's Collective Response When Kids Don't Learn: Adlai Stevenson High School

"In the factory model of schooling, quality was the variable; time was the constant. Students were given a set amount of work to do in a set period of time, then graded on the quality of what was accomplished. We held time constant, and allowed quality to vary. We must turn that on its head: Hold the quality of the work constant, and allow time to vary. We must realize we have the power to achieve a common curriculum by uncommon means."

—Robert Cole & Phillip Schlechty, 1993, p. 10

"Students simply cannot fall through the cracks here. We have too many systems in place to monitor their academic progress and general well-being and too many concerned adults involved in the implementation of those systems. Kids

Can this be achieved w/ 3 or 4 "tracks"?

Free question
to Gault-

WHATEVER IT TAKES

learn quickly that if they do not perform they will be answering to a coordinated team of staff members who will insist they put in extra time and get the help necessary to succeed."

—Dan Galloway, Principal, Adlai Stevenson High School

Adlai Stevenson
lower track

Adlai Stevenson High School in suburban Chicago is one of three schools in the nation to receive the United States Department of Education Blue Ribbon award on four separate occasions—an accomplishment which means that the school has continuously increased student achievement for two decades. It is one of the first comprehensive high schools in America to be designated "A New American High School" as a model of successful school reform and has been described as "an undeniably world-class school" (Schmoker, 2001). Yet everything described in the Johnny Jones scenario in chapter 2 came directly from Stevenson High School in the early 1980s. The motto of the school was "Success for Every Student," and the faculty was characterized by an exceptional work ethic. Many students flourished in the Stevenson environment; but, despite all of the faculty's hard work, many other students were unsuccessful. More than 25% of the student body had been relegated to remedial curricular tracks and, at the end of each semester, teachers were recommending that hundreds of students be transferred to a lower track. The failure rate topped 30%, and the annual number of out-of-school suspensions as a percentage of the student body had risen to over 75%.

In 1983 the school began a process to investigate steps that might be taken to address the needs of students who were not being successful. The process included building shared



knowledge about the current reality of the school and then engaging faculty, parents, and students in dialogue about the reasons more students were not being successful. The causes they identified could probably apply to most high schools.

Teacher concerns included:

- **The middle schools are not providing us with enough information on incoming freshmen.** Students were placed into the Stevenson curriculum solely on the basis of their performance on a single nationally normed test administered to them in eighth grade. A local percentile ranking was established for each member of the incoming class and students were then assigned into one of the high school's five curriculum tracks on the basis of their rank. Placement was based upon rigid caps and quotas. Only 10% of the incoming students could qualify for the most rigorous track (the honors program) while 25% were automatically relegated to the two remedial tracks (the modified and basic programs). High school teachers had no access to information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of a particular student. All that was available to a teacher who wanted to explore background information on a student was the student's grades from middle school, immunization record, and local percentile ranking from the nationally normed test. Teachers complained that they were working in the dark.
- **Incoming students lack study skills and good work habits.** There was widespread concern among the high school faculty that many incoming freshmen had not learned how to study. They questioned the rigor of the

Copy
But for

Pre question
to Faculty -

WHATEVER IT TAKES

middle schools and were convinced that many students were unprepared and/or unwilling to meet the reasonable work demands in their courses.

- **Consequences for failure are inadequate and there are no incentives for good academic performance.** It was evident to teachers that many students were unaffected by a failing grade and were, in fact, quite willing to fail rather than do what was necessary to succeed. Teachers called for more dire consequences for failure and meaningful incentives to reward students who were being successful.

Parents had a different perspective on the reasons why students were unsuccessful at Stevenson. The phrase they used over and over again to describe the problem was this: "Stevenson lets students fall through the cracks." They criticized the school both for its inability to identify a student who was having difficulty until it was too late, and for its tendency to seek a solution by moving students to lower tracks. One tearful mother recounted that she had sent her son to Stevenson with high hopes for his success, but week after week went by with no feedback from the school. Finally, in the eleventh week of the semester she received his report card and found that he had received three grades of D. As she explained it:

"Doesn't anyone at Stevenson understand the implications of your failure to keep parents informed about the progress of our students? My son will never be admitted to the leading public university in our state because 50% of his grade in his first semester of high school has been locked in as a D. He no longer has access to a



A High School's Collective Response When Kids Don't Learn

number of opportunities and options that are available to successful students. Yet no one in the school had the courtesy to let me know he was having difficulty. How do you expect parents to be partners in the education of their children if you keep us in the dark until it is too late?"

Students presented yet another explanation for their lack of success. Many students, particularly those in the remedial tracks, felt no connection with their school. High school was something to be endured rather than enjoyed. They regarded class work as boring and questioned whether anyone at the school really took an interest in them as individuals.

If the purpose of school is simply to give students the *opportunity* to learn, Stevenson was fulfilling its purpose in the early 1980s. Many of its students were achieving at very high levels, and the school could point to them as evidence that the problem was not with the school, but with the inability or unwillingness of some students to put forth the effort to learn. But, to the enduring credit of Stevenson's wonderful faculty, they did not settle for giving students the chance to learn. Instead, they began a systematic effort to better meet the needs of all students so that the school's promise of "success for all" might be a reality rather than a slogan.

Pre-Enrollment Initiatives

When the Stevenson staff took time to analyze the current reality of the school, it became evident that the school needed to become more proactive in identifying students who would need additional support in order to be successful in high school. As a result of that finding, several new programs and procedures were initiated.

Cross
elect
Inr

Mr
h
e

But for

Pre question
to faculty -

WHATEVER IT TAKES

Placement by Proficiency Rather Than by Caps and Quotas

Although Stevenson claimed to embrace the idea of "success for all," its placement procedures reflected the selecting and sorting mentality upon which schools had been built earlier in the century. The nationally normed test administered to students for their placement into the high school was used not to assess the proficiency of individual students in essential areas of learning, but rather to establish a continuum of scores for assigning students into programs according to the bell-shaped curve. A score that might qualify a student for the regular college preparatory program one year could relegate a student to a remedial program the next. It was not the score that mattered in placing a student: it was the student's rank within the incoming class that determined his or her placement. Furthermore, the results from the nationally normed test did not provide teachers with an assessment of an individual student's mastery of essential knowledge and skills. Teachers had no relevant information regarding the academic achievement of the students assigned to their classes.

Ultimately, the staff recognized the incongruity between a mission statement that promised to help all students reach high levels of achievement and a school structure designed to sort and select students according to the bell-shaped curve. Working in partnership with teachers from the six middle schools, they began the exploration of the first critical question of a PLC: What is it we want all students to learn? Within a few months teachers were able to clarify what every student leaving eighth grade was expected to know and be able to do in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and foreign languages.



y Caps and Quotas

brace the idea of "suc-
reflected the selecting
ols had been built ear-
ed test administered to
h school was used not
students in essential
a continuum of scores
according to the bell-
a student for the reg-
year could relegate a
It was not the score
is the student's rank
ed his or her place-
nationally normed
sment of an individ-
ge and skills. Teach-
ding the academic
eir classes.

ongruity between a
all students reach
ucture designed to
bell-shaped curve.
m the six middle
st critical question
earn? Within a few
ry student leaving
able to do in the
oreign languages.

The high school and middle school teachers then turned their attention to the second critical question: How will we know if each student has achieved the intended outcomes by the end of eighth grade? State assessments had not yet been developed, so the middle school and the high school teachers worked together to develop criterion-referenced proficiency tests to answer that question. These proficiency tests became the new basis for placing students into Stevenson's newly designed program.

The five different ability levels were collapsed into three. A standard proficiency score was established based on the recommendation of the teachers who had developed the test, and students were advised that all those who reached that standard in a given area of the test would be invited into the honors pro-^{AP}gram—a program specifically designed to help students earn college credits while still in high school. A second score was established as the qualifying standard for entry into the college-preparatory program—a program designed to provide students with a solid, rigorous liberal arts curriculum that would prepare them for success in higher education. Placement was by area rather than by track; that is, a student who qualified for honors mathematics might be recommended for the college preparatory English program.

Students who were unable to achieve the prerequisite score for either the honors or college preparatory curriculum were recommended for the modified program. This program, however, was designed to be far different than the remedial programs that preceded it. Students assigned to those earlier programs had languished there for 4 years. There was virtually no opportunity for upward mobility into higher-level curriculum. The

Pre question
to faculty -

WHATEVER IT TAKES

new structure, however, limited modified courses to the freshman and sophomore years. Juniors and seniors would have only two levels available to them—college preparatory and honors. This change redefined the entire purpose of the modified program. No longer was it to serve as a 4-year holding pen; now it was to serve as a 2-year launching pad that accelerated student learning so that every student would have access to college preparatory curriculum in their final 2 years. Juniors and seniors who pursued technical or vocational programs were now expected to complete the same English, math, science, and social studies courses as their college-bound classmates.

The proficiency tests were not used as a barrier to student aspirations. If students or parents were disappointed with the recommended placement, students were given multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency on different forms of the placement test during the second semester of eighth grade. A summer program was offered for students who sought tutoring in order to improve their placement. And in the final analysis, if the student or parent persisted in seeking the higher placement despite the school's recommendation, the student would be enrolled in the more advanced course and given 6 weeks to demonstrate that he or she was capable of meeting its standards.

With the administration of these new proficiency tests to eighth graders, high school teachers were able to identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of each student entering their classroom as freshmen. Junior high school teachers were provided with an analysis of the proficiency of their graduates in each of the skills assessed on the new tests. This vital information enabled them to identify areas of the curriculum that

needed more
over the
invaluabl
skilled at

Couns

The :
academic
school. S
tion. Ot
that imp
cerned t
the vari
gram wa

Ever
each of
son to c
dent wh
progress
relation
ment. I
"Which

In A
review
counse
clarify
may ha
tions a
school
vices r

